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ABSTRACT

Described are a Texas special education region's activities with the 3-year Project CCEC (Changing Curriculum for Exceptional Children) which provides training in the application of the theories of J. Piaget to the education of exceptional children, and with Project SERT (Special Education for Regular Teachers) which trains regular classroom teachers in the competencies needed for mainstreaming handicapped children. Briefly described is the training program format of CCEC including the following modules: "Exceptional Learners - A New Approach," "Developmental Theory - Cognitive Development in Children," "Assessment - Piaget's Clinical Model," "The Classroom - Where the Interaction Is." Described for Project SERT are the following instructional modules: "Comprehensive Special Education," "Formal Appraisal," "Team Planning for Student Program Management," "Informal Assessment," "Organizing Content for Individual Differences," "Materials Selection," "Classroom Management," and "Evaluation of Instruction." (DB)

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MEETING INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION NEEDS through SPECIAL PROJECTS:

CHANGING CURRICULUM FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

and

SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR REGULAR TEACHERS

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PROJECT C.C.E.C. - CHANGING CURRICULUM FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Introduction

Recent priorities addressed by the Texas Education Agency, as well as other Texas public institutions, have focused attention on providing and promoting appropriate educational services for all school age youngsters.

In 1967 the Texas State Legislature authorized the establishment of twenty Education Service Centers to be situated across Texas in geographically strategic locations. These Service Centers were mandated to strengthen the public education system through a variety of cooperative services. The Region 10 Education Service Center (ESC) program was initiated as a result of the guidelines established by the 59th and 60th Texas State Legislatures. The Center's program is designed to provide specialized educational services in response to the needs of each school district it serves. Programs are offered in instructional services, administrative services, computer services, instructional media services, driver education, business services, and special educational services.

With the advent of the State Plan for Comprehensive Special Education (Plan A) in 1970, the Texas Education Agency initiated a major move toward providing more adequate services for handicapped children and adolescents. Current state guidelines permit special educators to select from a variety of instructional arrangements. Once a decision has been made regarding a child's placement in one of these educational settings, educator's must develop and implement a curriculum matched to each student's unique learning needs. Recognizing the significance of matching individual learner needs with an appropriate curriculum,

educators have become increasingly aware that alternative instructional strategies based on identified learner skills or abilities, rather than the psychology of handicapping conditions, probably represents a more feasible and realistic approach.

About the same time that Plan A was being developed, the Texas Education Agency's Division of Special Education and Special Schools initiated a series of state-wide awareness conferences relating to the "Application of Piagetian Learning Theories to Curriculum Development for Exceptional Children."* These conferences or "phase meetings" were designed to motivate Texas educational leaders to analyze existing instructional programs and make intensive efforts to promote educational change for exceptional children. As an active participant in the "Phase" movement, the Special Educational Services Department of the Education Service Center, Region 10, conceptualized and was funded a special project to develop a model for articulating the practical application of Piaget's theory in the classroom. The principle aim of the "Changing Curriculum for Exceptional Children" project has been to promote awareness, interest, and motivation in educators, which would serve as a foundation for the application of developmental learning theory and informal Piagetian assessment principles in the classroom.

During the 1973-1974 project year, activities were initiated which led to the development of the Teacher Training Package and Informal Assessment Kit Prototypes. To accomplish specific development objectives,

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*Texas Education Agency, The Application of Piagetian Learning Theories to Curriculum Development for Exceptional Children, Special Study Institute, Department of Special Education and Special Schools, Austin, Texas, 1973.

two area school districts, an independent educational development laboratory, and the Region 10 ESC supplied personnel to serve on a developer team. Members of this team received in excess of 100 hours of formal and informal instruction from numerous nationally known experts in the field of Piagetian theory and as a result formulated the basic content of the program.

During the second year of the project school districts were invited to participate in a pilot field-testing program, which was designed to train teachers, support level personnel, and administrators to utilize developmental learning theory and informal assessment as tools to restructure curricula. The training phases were accomplished at two levels. First, ESC Region 10 staff went into each district and trained a "Core Team" which consisted of at least three members; one from instruction, one from administration, and one from curriculum. As a result of this training, and subsequent to the installation of all necessary materials, each "Core Team" was charged with conducting its own seminar with at least twenty-five teachers from within its district. This second phase, designated as the "Teacher Group" level, involved approximately 142 instructional personnel from both regular (or mainstream) and special education. For being a participant in the training seminar each teacher was committed to use the assessment techniques taught them with several students. By the end of the year 249 student profiles had been developed. Consultative assistance was provided by project personnel to assist participants, upon request, in identifying specific procedures and techniques when implementing the principles and concepts of a Piagetian approach.

The objectives for the third and final year of the project have been twofold. First, based on feedback provided by workshop participants during the pilot year modifications have been initiated with respect to packaging format and substantive material content. Second, additional Region 10 ESC school districts have been involved in the training phase with more emphasis placed on direct application to the classroom. Follow-up activities via in-service training are currently centering on providing practical methods for teachers to provide classroom experiences which best fit the individual student's cognitive style as determined through the use of Piagetian Informal Assessment.

TRAINING PROGRAM FORMAT

The specific content of the program is presented in a sequential modular format to emphasize two factors salient to the task of a teacher's employing Piagetian theory in Changing Curriculum for Exceptional Children. First, the package stresses the development of assessment strategies and interview techniques based on Piagetian developmental theory. Secondly, the content and learning experiences are objectively sequenced to facilitate appropriate development consistent with identified participant needs. The modules present information in the following areas:

MODULE 1 - Exceptional Learners - A New Approach

Significant points are stressed with respect to the individual needs of the young learner and how the teacher can meet these needs. The major objective is to create a general awareness of the goal of education and the role of the teacher. Discussion activities are

directed toward providing the teacher opportunity to explore how knowledge of developmental theory and stages of cognitive development can lead to improved educational programs for individual children.

MODULE 2 - Developmental Theory: Cognitive Development in Children

The primary objective of this module is to present information relevant to developmental learning theory, an understanding of cognitive thought processes, and Piaget's theory of intellectual development. Specific activities are designed to lead discussions about learning, individual differences, cognitive development, and development of intelligence.

MODULE 3 - Assessment: Piaget's Clinical Method

A variety of activities are presented in this module to promote discussion concerning the dynamics, procedures, interpretations, and implications of Piaget's Clinical Assessment Method. Teachers become more aware of ways to observe children's behavior; how to be a critical listener of their speech; and how to effectively assess their thinking abilities.

MODULE 4 - The Classroom: Where the Interaction Is

This module serves to facilitate discussion about the teacher's role in applying developmental theory in the classroom. Teachers discuss organization and management issues of a general nature in order to establish a broad conceptual framework which will be a catalyst for the specific design of individual instructional activities.

Each module is designed to present the participant with a variety of opportunities for active interaction. Small and large group activities and use of audio-visual material are methods employed to enrich specific experiences. Several 16 mm films are included in the Trainer's Package which provide information relevant to an understanding of the composition of thought, cognitive development, and Piagetian assessment techniques. Participants also have opportunity to observe and interact during live demonstrations with young children in order to clarify and reinforce their experiences.

EVALUATION

Evaluation strategies and data collection procedures are another important facet of the program. Data are collected both at a pre-workshop and post-workshop level with respect to each participant's perceived mastery of the material and actual content mastery. Perceived content mastery information is collected via questionnaires, while actual mastery is assessed by response to an objective-type test. The pre-post data serves to evaluate the effectiveness of the program as a whole and the level of cognitive gain of the participants as a result of their involvement. As a follow-up activity a specially designed needs assessment instrument is employed to provide a basis for planning and providing on-going consultative assistance to project participants.

While the "Changing Curriculum for Exceptional Children" project attempts to provide educators with yet another tool to deal with the special educational needs of youngsters, another ESC Region 10 project focuses on preparing regular classroom teachers to accept special

education students back into the mainstream of education. Project S.E.R.T. (Special Education for Regular Teachers) addresses this issue by attempting to develop the competencies of the regular classroom teacher which are required for successful implementation of the mainstreaming aspect of Plan A in Texas.

Following a development period, which included a comprehensive validation process, eight instructional modules were designed and field tested. Data collected during the field testing indicated that the modules serve as an effective delivery system for increasing competence among participants. Revisions following the field testing produced a set of eight instructional modules as described below:

MODULE 1 - Comprehensive Special Education

Crucial factors in the regular teacher's entry into the Comprehensive Special Education framework are his appreciation of the individual needs which exist in his class and his understanding of how the framework can assist him in meeting those needs. This module has two basic objectives: a) the development of appreciation for individual differences in students and b) an understanding of the concepts of Comprehensive Special Education.

MODULE 2 - Formal Appraisal

At the outset of the regular teacher's involvement in the delivery of special services, he is likely to be overwhelmed with the vast amount of appraisal data generated on individual students and expressed in unfamiliar terminology. While he does not need to become an appraisal expert, the teacher does

need to develop a healthy respect for formal tests - both what they do and do not provide him in terms of instructional guidelines.

The major thrust of this module then is directed toward the regular teacher's acquisition of a working knowledge of the basic appraisal instruments useful in planning instructional strategies.

MODULE 3 - Team Planning for Student Program Management

Essential objectives of this module are a) to develop the teacher's understanding of the dependence of the Texas comprehensive plan upon the teamwork of special and regular educators; b) to assist the teacher to develop a facility for using the team concept as it is practiced in his school district; c) to aid the teacher in formulating the role he will be able to maintain on the educational team; and d) to enhance the teacher's development of effective communication techniques for team participation.

MODULE 4 - Informal Assessment

This module is intended to help the teacher develop techniques for identifying potential trouble spots within his own classroom. These techniques include a) inventories of the essential skills and understandings necessary for adequate functioning in his subject or at his level; b) systematic observation skills for

identifying those children whose overt behavior may indicate learning difficulties; and c) the use of social development and acceptance scales.

Primarily these competencies are directed toward making the regular classroom teacher a more efficient user of the referral system and a more reliable member of the Assignment, Review and Dismissal (ARD) Committee. Using these practices, he cannot only help to narrow down the referrals before they get to the ARD committee, but he can also present a more concrete and distinct picture to the committee as it begins its tasks.

MODULE 5 - Organizing Content for Individual Differences

If all the preliminary work of the ARD committee, diagnostic teacher, resource teacher and other specialists who have participated in identification of individual student needs and development of educational plans is to bear fruit, the regular classroom teacher must be able to follow through on the recommended programs. Basic to this ability is the teacher's recognition of the fundamental concepts and skills necessary for adequate student performance in the various content areas. Consequently, the objective of this module is to assist the teacher acquire a sequential or developmental framework of skills and understandings for organizing each of his instructional areas of responsibility.

MODULE 6 - Materials Selection

The provision of adequate budgetary resources for purchasing instructional materials and accompanying publication of a large variety of these resources have effectively eliminated "lack of materials" as an excuse for failing to provide individualized instruction. Indeed there are sufficient goods on the market in most content areas to require the teacher to evaluate and select the most appropriate materials for accomplishing the desired goal rather than being restricted to one or two items and having to build a program around these. Thus the objectives of this module are directed toward those competencies of

a) familiarity with,
b) location of,
c) evaluation of and
d) development of

instructional resources.

MODULE 7 - Classroom Management

A traditional problem of the mildly handicapped youngster in regular education is the manifestation of overt social and attending behavior patterns inconsistent with the group norm. These behaviors themselves have frequently been the major reason for their being removed from the mainstream and placed in special classes. As such children are reintegrated into regular classes, teachers must acquire those competencies which will allow them to manage their classrooms in such a way that disruptive behavior patterns do not reemerge.

MODULE 8 - Evaluation of Instruction

This module is focused upon follow-up of educational planning. Teachers should be skilled in monitoring student progress and evaluating their own performance; if plans for individual instruction are prepared with precision, they deserve a precise implementation. This requires continuous, systematic evaluation of the student's growth based upon the projections of his plan. Also, it demands that the teacher compare his own performance to the instructional practices recommended for the student. This, of course, results in a form of audit for the educational plan of each student, "Did we do what we said we would and what has that action produced?" The competencies required to make the teacher a skillful auditor of classroom practices are the objectives of this package.

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